

which from his childhood his imagination had
been filled

by the study of history. ' With a person of my
turn', he said,

the minute touches are of as great interest,
and perhaps
greater, than the most important events.
Spending so
much time as I do in solitude, my mind would
have rusted
by gazing vacantly at the shop windows. As it
is, I am no
sooner in the streets than I am in Greece, in
Rome, in the
midst of the French Revolution. Precision in
dates, the
day or hour in which a man was born or died,
becomes
absolutely necessary. A slight fact, a sentence,
a word, are
of Importance in my romance. Pepys' Diary
formed al-
most inexhaustible food for my fancy. I seem
to know
every Inch of Whitehall. I go in at Hans
Holbein's gate,
and come out through the matted gallery. The
conversa-
tions which I compose between great people of
the time are
long, and sufficiently animated : In the style,
If not with
the merits of Sir Walter Scott's. The old parts
of London,
which you are sometimes surprised at my
knowing so well,
those old gates and houses down by the river,
have all
played their part in my stories.¹

The ' castle-building ', as Macaulay called
it, is the
source of some of his inaccuracies and errors.
Before he
began to write the history of the reigns of James
and William
he had formed his conceptions of the chief
figures in his
story—conceptions so vivid and so clear that
they had be-
come realities to him, and he did not
remember that they

were his own creatures. And he had constructed these figures, not after a systematic examination of all the accessible evidence, but on the basis of his wide and desultory reading. Amongst these familiar figures were no doubt the barbarous Claverhouse with his * seared conscience and adamant heart', that * prodigy of turpitude', Marlborough, and the eminently virtuous William Penn who was always being seduced from the path of rectitude.

¹ Margaret Macaulay's Journal, Mar. 30, 1831. Trevelyan, i. 183-4.